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# EPIDEMIC OF URBAN VIOLENCE THREATENS CITIES--

## ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNER SUGGESTS WAYS TO HEAD IT OFF

BEVERLY HILLS: An epidemic of urban violence is threatening to rage throughout our cities--last in a long list of historical urban afflictions, including war, disease, pestilence and ravaging mobs.

To meet this epidemic, writes RICHARD MEIER, Professor of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley, local governments should attempt to utilize privacy as a cure for urban violence.

Discussing urban violence as a result of American urbanization since 1920, Meier, author of Developmental Planning and Science and Economic Development, cites overcrowding as having a direct connection with violence in U.S. cities. He claims that more than anything, privacy as a protection from society, can alleviate the social problems of the ghettos.

Meier notes that laboratory experiments with animals suggest that privacy seems to be essential for the maintenance of community peace. He then applies this same social concept to the conditions in the ghetto where often individuals do not have control over spaces, walls, lighting, etc. so as to keep interruptions (along with the errors they cause) down to a tolerable frequency. This gives rise to tension, and makes violence more probable.

Meier argues that the design of our cities and the actual environmental factors that make up a city's form open up many more alternatives for finding solutions to the problem, by providing space and privacy for urban dwellers.

Meier also proposes, in his article "Violence: The Last Urban Epidemic," that modern means could be devised to give indication of increases in urban friction. As a result, communities could move to head off any impending violence.

Meier was writing in a special issue of The AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST (a research-oriented journal in the social sciences) entitled "Urban Violence and Disorder." The special issue is available from Sage Publications, Inc., 275 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90212. The price is \$3.50 each or quantity rates are available for educational and bulk orders.